

## **GAO Analysis of the Oregon Inlet Project**

The General Accounting Office (GAO) has released an audit of the navigation project to build jetties at Oregon Inlet in North Carolina. This report provides a current and independent assessment of this project, which was authorized in 1970 to provide safe and reliable passage for fishing vessels from the Atlantic Ocean to Roanoke and Pamlico sounds.

Here are the key GAO conclusions:

- The GAO found that a new economic analysis would be needed before the project could go forward.
- The GAO found that high winds, strong tides, shifting sand and storms exacerbate the hazardous conditions there, making this inlet the most dangerous on the Atlantic Coast. The GAO report further indicates that, according to Corps and Coast Guard data, these hazards were a factor in 25 deaths and the loss of 22 vessels during the past 40 years.

The GAO found that dredging has not been a reliable means of maintaining a safe navigation channel. Because of the high-energy environment at the inlet, dredging efforts have not provided a safe navigation channel. Consequently, loss of life and loss of vessels and vessel damage will likely continue.

The Corps believes the GAO's conclusions about economic benefits are reasonable. We also believe that some of the differences in benefits cited in the report result from differences in methodologies used by the two agencies. In addition, the Corps own policies would require a new economic analysis, since our most recent data are more than five years old.

Both the Departments of Commerce and Interior have expressed environmental concerns about the project, and these have been referred to the Council on Environmental Quality for resolution. The Corps and GAO agree that it would not be prudent to spend public funds for additional reanalysis until these issues are resolved and there are assurances from the Department of Interior that the permits needed to anchor the jetties on its lands will be granted.

The Corps believes we have made the appropriate design changes and taken adequate measures in response to these environmental concerns. We also believe the jetty project is an appropriate solution to the navigation problems in the dangerous, high-energy environment of Oregon Inlet.

The GAO report is available at <http://www.gao.gov> Click on link titled GAO Reports, then click on link titled October 7, 2002. Further details about the Oregon Inlet jetty project can be found at <http://www.saw.usace.army.mil/oregoninlet/main.html>